

Journal of Development Economics
Pre-Results Review (Registered Reports)
Guidelines for Authors

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Introduction

As part of a pilot initiative, the *Journal of Development Economics (JDE)* now offers authors the opportunity to have their prospective empirical projects reviewed and approved for publication **before** the results are known. This *pre-results review* track for submissions is based on a two-stage peer review process, during which authors receive feedback on both the research design and proposed statistical analysis plan (Stage 1) and the full manuscript (Stage 2). Throughout the publishing process, we will refer to articles in this track as [Registered Reports](#), in line with the terminology adopted by journals in other disciplines and the existing Elsevier publishing infrastructure.

Stage 1 submissions for pre-results review typically include key background literature and motivation for the study, hypotheses, study procedures, proposed statistical analysis plan, a statistical power analysis, and pilot data (wherever applicable). Following peer review, high-quality Stage 1 submissions are **accepted based on pre-results review**, after which authors implement the pre-specified research design and submit a full manuscript, including results and discussion sections (Stage 2). This final manuscript is appraised by reviewers for quality assurance and then published, provided that the implementation of the data collection and analysis maintains high standards of quality (see Appendix A: Flowchart of the Pre-Results Review Process at the JDE).

The pre-results review track is designed to award well-designed and well-executed studies regardless of whether their empirical results yield clear interpretations. With that in mind, we envision that this track for submissions will be particularly attractive to development economists working on research projects for which the data is yet to be collected (or researchers who have not yet had access to the data they will analyze).

Submissions for pre-results review follow the same publishing policies and formatting rules as regular submissions outlined in the [JDE Author Information Pack](#), including the JDE [Mandatory Replication Policy](#). In addition, submissions for pre-results review must follow the guidelines outlined below.

Pre-Results Review at the JDE

Stage 1

Submission Details

New submissions for pre-results review should be submitted as a '*Registered Report Stage 1: Proposal*' through the EVISE [submissions portal](#) of the JDE. Stage 1 submissions should not exceed 30 pages including figures, tables, schemes and references and should be submitted as an editable .doc or .pdf document.

Beyond details on the research question(s), literature review, hypotheses, research design and statistical analysis plan, the following items are required for Stage 1 pre-results review submissions:

- *Cover Page*, including title of the study, date of the latest draft, keywords, [JEL codes](#), and study pre-registration status¹;
- *Proposed timeline for completion of the study*, if accepted based on pre-results review following Stage 1 review;
- *Abstract* of up to 150 words;
- *Administrative Information* (included at the end of the submission), including confirmation on funding and ethics approval, conflicts of interest and acknowledgments.

Authors may refer to the [Stage 1 Submission Template](#) for a guide on the content of your Stage 1 submission. While not all of its fields are required, this template may serve as a helpful resource for documenting your research design.

Stage 1 submissions may include pilot data to establish proof of concept, effect size estimations, and/or feasibility of proposed methods. Any pilot trials will be published with the final version of the manuscript and will be clearly distinguished from data obtained for the pre-specified research design. For more details and instructions for sending data and figures, please see JDE's [Mandatory Replication Policy](#).

Review Criteria and Editorial Decisions

Stage 1 submissions will be pre-screened by the Editorial Board for completeness and to ensure they fall within the scope and quality standards of the JDE in terms of their *i*) topic, *ii*) potential contribution to the development economics literature, and *iii*) methodological rigor. Stage 1 submissions that are not deemed to meet these criteria will receive a desk-rejection. Stage 1 submissions that meet these initial criteria will be sent for in-depth peer review, where reviewers will be asked to assess:

1. The importance of the research question(s), in terms of its contribution or value added to the development economics literature;
2. The logic, rationale, and plausibility of the proposed hypotheses;
3. The soundness and feasibility of the methodology and statistical analysis plan (including statistical power analysis, where appropriate). The proposed timeline for completion of the study will not have an impact on the editorial decision at Stage 1. However, authors will be expected to comply with it and communicate changes to the Editorial Board in a timely fashion;
4. Whether the clarity and degree of methodological detail are sufficient to replicate the proposed experimental procedures and statistical analysis plan in line with the JDE [Mandatory Replication Policy](#);
5. Whether the authors have pre-specified sufficient outcome-neutral tests for ensuring that the results obtained can test the stated hypotheses, including data quality checks for data accuracy, consistency, bias, and completeness.

Following Stage 1 peer review, submissions will be either 1) rejected; 2) returned to authors for the opportunity to revise and resubmit; or 3) *accepted based on pre-results review*. Pre-results acceptance constitutes a commitment by the journal to later publish the resulting full paper, subject to a successful

¹ The JDE strongly encourages authors to pre-register their research designs on publicly available hypothesis repositories *prior* to commencement of data collection. For more information, see 'Pre-registration Resources' section below.

Stage 2 review. Accepted Stage 1 submissions will not be published as stand-alone articles. Instead, they will be included as supporting materials along with the full paper at published at Stage 2.

The JDE encourages authors to include articles accepted based on pre-results review as forthcoming publications in their CVs, acknowledging that they were accepted as part of this review process.

After Pre-Results Acceptance and Before Stage 2

- Once accepted based on pre-results review, authors should proceed with data collection and analysis based on the accepted research design, and then submit a full manuscript for Stage 2 review. Authors should be reminded that in line with JDE's [Mandatory Replication Policy](#), data will be posted on the JDE Web site alongside the article. Moreover, *authors may be asked to submit the data, programs, and other details of the computations sufficient to permit replication at the review stage, if requested by the reviewers or the Editor.*
- Authors will have full control over their study throughout the review process at the JDE. This means that authors are free to withdraw their submission at any time, or submit it to another journal. The JDE Editorial Board does not consider submission for a pre-results review and approval to be an implicit contract to first try to publish at JDE upon completion of the final paper. Authors are therefore free to first try for “top 5” journals, for example. However, if published elsewhere, the JDE asks that working papers and published papers acknowledge that the article underwent peer review and was accepted on pre-results review basis at the JDE.
- Some deviations from the pre-specified research design are often inevitable, and should be clearly documented and included in the Stage 2 submission. To learn more, see “Deviations from the Pre-specified Research Design” below.

Stage 2

Submission Details

After completing data collection and analysis based on the Stage 1 pre-specified research design, authors should submit their full-length manuscript as a ‘Registered Report Stage 2: Full Article’ through JDE's [submissions portal](#), along with the accepted Stage 1 proposal as supporting material. Authors may use the accepted Stage 1 submission as a base for their Stage 2 submissions, including the introduction, research design and statistical analysis sections.

Please note that the results of **all hypotheses pre-specified at Stage 1 must be included in the full manuscript submitted at Stage 2**. Exploratory analyses (not fully pre-specified in the in Stage 1 submission) may be performed and authors are free to include their results in the full paper at Stage 2. However, these results must be clearly caveated as a result of exploratory analysis. In instances where a pre-specified hypothesis is subsequently shown to be logically flawed or unfounded, authors may include it in an Appendix (if particularly lengthy) or as a footnote, rather than in the ‘Results’ section.

Authors should note that Stage 2 submissions follow the same publishing policies and formatting rules as regular full length articles submitted to the *JDE*, including guidelines and policies on [Publishing and Ethics](#), [the JDE Mandatory Replication Policy](#), [Data Sharing instructions](#), [Copyright policy](#) and [Artwork and media formatting instructions](#). Please review these policies before you start preparing your final submission.

Review Criteria and Editorial Decisions

The Editorial Board will make an effort to ensure that manuscripts at Stage 2 are considered by the same reviewers as at Stage 1, however they may also invite new reviewers. To ensure continuity, reviewers at Stage 2 will have access to the original submission that was accepted on pre-results basis at Stage 1.

In considering full manuscripts at Stage 2, reviewers will be asked to evaluate:

1. Whether the study was implemented according to the research design pre-specified at Stage 1. This involves an evaluation of whether the study implementation maintained high standard of quality, particularly whether the attrition rate was high in the given context, or there was a high differential attrition between treatment and control groups;
2. Whether the collected data is of sufficient quality to test the pre-specified hypotheses. In particular, whether the pre-specified data quality checks were satisfied and descriptive statistics provide convincing evidence that the data could credibly measure the impact of the intervention;
3. In cases of deviations from the pre-specified research design, whether the author(s) provided a convincing theoretical and/or methodological justification;
4. Whether any exploratory analyses added by the authors are justified, methodologically sound, and informative. Exploratory analyses must be clearly noted, and the results of all hypotheses specified in the Stage 1 submission must be reported.
5. Whether the author's' interpretation of the research findings are consistent with the data and the overall evidence.

Authors and reviewers should note that **editorial decisions will not be based on the perceived importance, novelty or conclusiveness of the actual results**. This is a key feature of pre-results review. Whereas reviewers are free to enter such comments on the record, they will not influence editorial decisions. Reviewers at Stage 2 may suggest that authors report additional tests which were not pre-specified; however, authors are not obliged to do so unless such tests are necessary to satisfy one or more of the Stage 2 review criteria.

Deviations from the Pre-specified Research Design

It is reasonable to expect that pre-specified research designs may sometimes run into practical difficulties in their implementation². Authors should keep records of all instances when the study cannot be completed as specified, and clearly report and justify them in their Stage 2 submission. If authors want to discuss the context and provide justification for deviations in greater detail, they may choose to attach a cover letter to their Stage 2 submission.

In principle, deviations resulting from a limited uptake of an intervention which was conducted as specified (e.g. if the treatment group persistently failed to comply with the intervention, or the intervention proved

² To reduce the cost of pre-specification, authors may also consider the use of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), which provide justifications for decisions during the implementation of study protocols on theoretical and/or methodological grounds (for more information on this approach, see Lin and Green (2016))

impractical) may be justifiable. However, authors should anticipate such challenges as much as possible in their Stage 1 submission and propose measures to prevent them.

In all instances of deviations, the Editorial Board will determine whether they were clearly reported and justifiable on theoretical and/or methodological grounds. The Editorial Board may decide that the study is no longer eligible for publication as a Registered Report in any of the following cases:

- a) The study was not conducted as specified, but not all deviations were reported;
- b) The Stage 2 submission failed to report the results of any of the pre-specified hypotheses;
- c) A different intervention than pre-specified was conducted or the pre-specified intervention was only partially implemented, including due to natural disasters, political violence, and other objective circumstances;
- d) The study suffered from a large sample size attrition and related statistical power level;
- e) Exploratory analyses were reported as pre-specified;
- f) The study used different variables (or the variables were not constructed as pre-specified) without also reporting the outcomes with the pre-specified variables;
- g) The study used different rules for excluding observations without also reporting the analysis outcomes with the pre-specified exclusion rules;
- h) The study used a different statistical model, but failed to report the outcomes of the pre-specified statistical model;

Regardless of the type of deviation(s), editorial decisions will not be based on the perceived importance, direction, novelty or conclusiveness of the results of the study. If a deviation is major, for example a change in the primary hypothesis, then the authors have the option of withdrawing this Stage 2 manuscript and submitting it as a new “normal” submission. In such cases, the authors should not perceive there to be any change in the likelihood of acceptance, compared to the probability they would have had without the pre-results review process.

Pre-registration Resources

The JDE **strongly encourages authors to pre-register their research designs on publicly available hypothesis repositories at Stage 1** *prior* to the commencement of data collection. By pre-registering their studies, authors create public records that would allow readers to clearly see which analyses were pre-specified, thereby ensuring the validity of the research findings. To protect the integrity and confidentiality of studies which are still in progress, registries allow authors to embargo a pre-registration for an extended amount of time, some up to 5 years.

The American Economic Association ([AEA](#)) administers a registry for randomized controlled trials (RCTs), which can be accessed [here](#). This has become a standard hypothesis registry in economics, however authors are free to choose another registry, such as the Registry for International Development Impact Evaluations ([RIDIE](#)), the Open Science Framework ([OSF](#)) registry, [AsPredicted.org](#) or [ClinicalTrials.gov](#).

Information about pre-registration should be included in the Cover Page section, including the registry name, registration identifier, and/or a link to the public registration if available. If the study has not been

pre-registered at the time of submissions, authors should indicate whether they plan to complete pre-registration before the commencement of data collection.

Please contact Aleksandar Bogdanoski at abogdanoski@berkeley.edu with additional questions about pre-registration.

Tips for Avoiding Desk Rejection at Stage 1

Stage 1 submissions may receive a desk rejection prior to in-depth peer review if submissions are incomplete or are not considered a good fit for the JDE in terms of the topic, methods or contribution to the development economics literature. The following are some other reasons for desk rejection, and tips for how to avoid each:

- *Reason for Rejection:* Submission are incomplete or the necessary details of the research design are not reported clearly and in sufficient detail.

Tip: Authors are encouraged to consult the [RR Stage 1 Submission Template](#) for guidance on suggested information to include. All Stage 1 submissions should include cover page, abstract, proposed timeline and administrative information section — in addition to sections on research design and statistical analysis plan. The research design and analysis should include sufficient detail to enable reviewers to evaluate the submission in the light of the Stage 1 criteria outlined above.

- *Reason for Rejection:* Lack of correspondence between the pre-specified hypotheses and the statistical tests.

Tip: To maximize clarity of correspondence between predictions and analyses, authors are encouraged to number their hypotheses in the introduction section and then number the proposed analyses in the methods section to make clear which analysis tests which prediction. Power analysis, where applicable, should be based on the actual test procedures that will be employed to test those hypotheses.

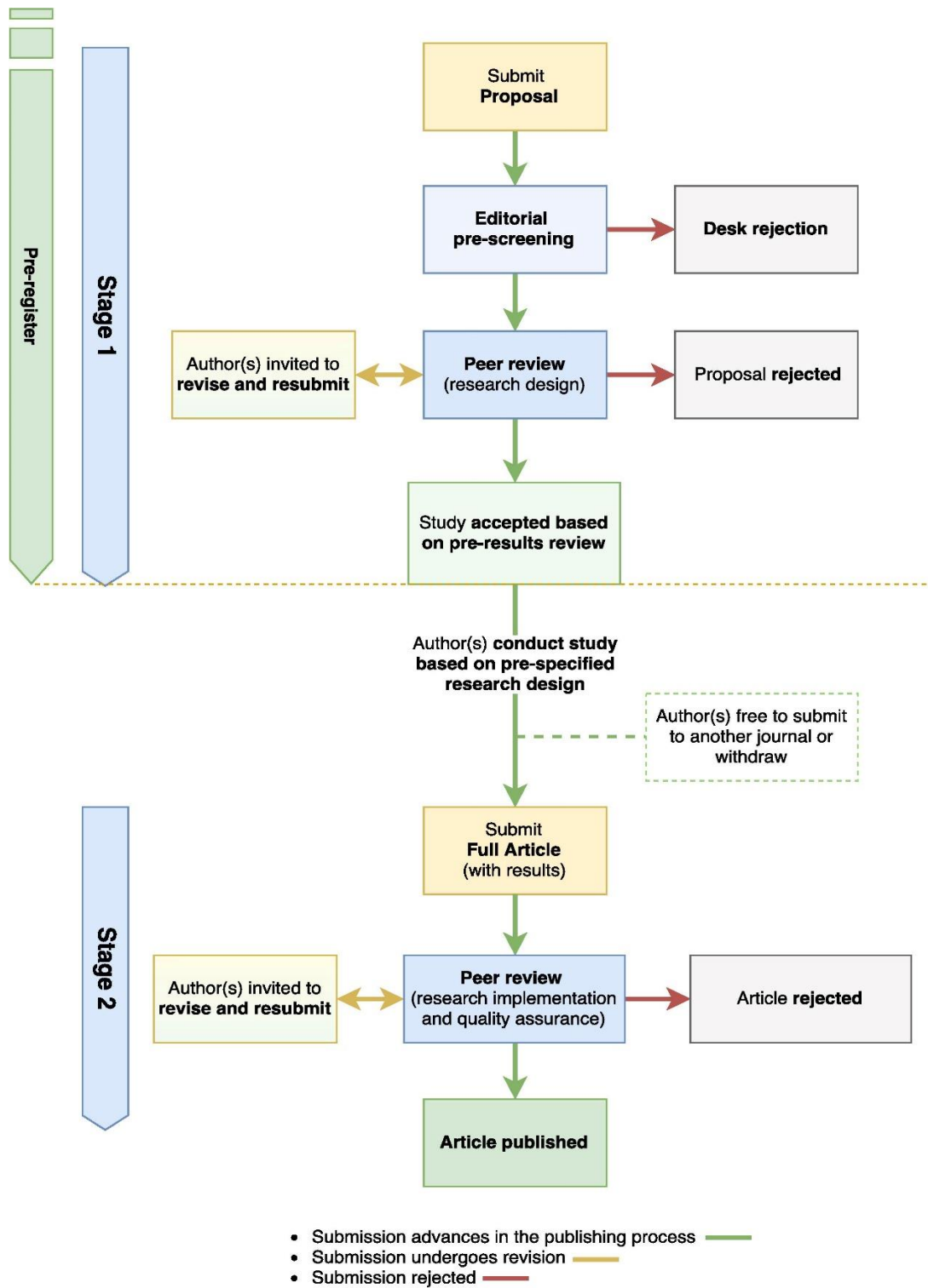
- *Reason for Rejection:* Statistical power analysis is over-optimistic or insufficiently justified

Tip: Stage 1 submissions should be powered to detect effect that is plausible and of theoretical value. Pilot data can help inform this estimate but is unlikely to form an acceptable basis, alone, for choosing the target effect size.

- *Reason for Rejection:* Failure to clearly distinguish work that has already been done from work that is planned.

Tip: Where a proposal contains a mixture of pilot work that has already been undertaken and a proposal for work not yet undertaken, authors should use the past tense for pilot work but the future tense for the proposed work. At Stage 2, all descriptions should shift to past tense.

Appendix A: Flowchart of the Pre-Review Process at the JDE



References

Lin, Winston, and Donald P. Green. 2016. "Standard Operating Procedures: A Safety Net for Pre-Analysis Plans." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 49 (3):495–500. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096516000810>